

# The Dynamics of Integrating Mentally Challenged Learners into Public Religious Sponsored Primary Schools in Gucha South Sub-County, Kisii-Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Free Primary Education (FPE) was meant to ensure that all children of school going age get quality and accessible basic education in the spirit of vision 2030 in Kenya. Unfortunately, children with mental disabilities hardly access basic quality education in this era of Free Primary Education. Learners with special needs are not fully included in regular classes because of a number of factors. In this piece, I purpose to discuss the dynamics involved in integrating of mentally challenged learners in regular public primary schools in Gucha South sub county, Kiisi-Kenya. The aim is to help in creating greater awareness on the need to improve on the access of education and improvement of academic performance of mentally challenged learners in and beyond Gucha South sub county among teachers, school administrators and other service providers. I further suggest the need for the ministry of education to lay emphasis on Individualized Educational Programme (IEP) and curriculum adaptation for better academic standards and results.

**Keywords:** Integration, Assessment, mental disability

## INTRODUCTION

Despite an increase in successful people without college degrees, education globally is seen as a major driver for active participation in society. It is more of a tradition for all children of school going age to attain a certain form of formal education from as early as 3 years. This is meant to prepare the child for serious and intentional education for a possible bright future. As such, international organizations and governments have ratified polies and laws to enforce this system more so from a rights-based approach. From this perspective, every individual has a right to education. This is clearly stipulated in article 26 of universal declaration of human rights of 1945 United Nations (1948). This right was further emphasized and affirmed as a plan of action in the world conference of special needs Education (SNE) held in Salamanca Spain/United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Dakar framework for action adapted the world declaration of Education for All (EFA) world Education forum (2000) which affirmed the notion of education as a fundamental right and established the new millennium goal to provide every girl and boy with primary school education by 2015. Launch (2001) also clearly identified special needs Education (SNE) as one of the key strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion in light of these efforts. The fundamental principle of the framework states that all children should have equal opportunity to learn whether with challenges or not. However, from my observation as a resident of the said area, for various reasons a significant number of children with special needs are excluded from both primary and secondary education opportunities in Gucha sub county. This unfortunately could be the case elsewhere in Kenya. In this paper, I identify four main factors that influence integration of mentally challenged learners (MCLs) in Primary schools in Kenya. These are: Parental role, Infrastructure, Teacher training

level, and the role of Teaching and Learning resources.

## Brief Background

Providing education as a right is an obligation of all governments and requires that they translate their national commitment into legislation. Universal education is a global goal which will only be achieved when universal right to education extends to individuals with special needs and disabilities in the country's Ministry of Education (MOE) (2009). In a meeting held in 1990 in Jomtein Thailand, education as a human right was reaffirmed by 155 nations who adopted and were signatories to the world declaration on education for all (EFA) by the year 2000. Special needs education is defined in terms of children with a range of physical, sensory, intellectual, emotional or other challenges. The concept of SNE has to be widened to include all children who for whatever reasons are failing to benefit from normal school program. Among the children who are denied access to education throughout the world, a significant number have special needs in education (UNESCO, 1994). Integration movement is noted to have developed as much, in response to broad based social, political and economic demands as to the sincere attempts by education to place children with special needs in appropriate environment (Kaufmann, 1978). Integration has taken a global trust since its inception in the 1960s and remains a topic of international concern and open debate. Integration exposes children with special needs to a broader curriculum which benefits them psychologically and socially since it does not limit their interaction to only other challenged children, Anderson (1973). In as much as it is seen to benefit these children, it can also be viewed as human right (Fish, 1995).

During the world conference on Education in Jomtien Thailand in 1990, primary education was declared by the United Nations as a Human Right which should be given to every child regardless of his/her challenges without discriminations UNESCO (1998). Integration has therefore been formalized by legislation in many countries such as United States of America 1975, Sweden – 1965 Scandinavian countries 1969, Anderson 1973, UNESCO (2001). In sub-Sahara Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa share strong history of active disability rights organization (Were 2008). Most learners with special needs in education in the region have been actively engaged in education activities for at least a decade. The South Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) enjoys a strong regional presence providing co-ordination and support of national level initiatives. The African decade of Disabled person 2000-2009 was declared by the organization for African unity and have received support from the United Nations Bane (2009)

The government of Kenya places emphasis on special needs education among the commission established by the government to look into sustainability of the educational provision for all children, Ngala Mwendwa (1964) Gachati common (1976) and others. The national committee on education objectives and policies (1976 Gachati report emphasized the importance of improving education and other relevant services for persons with disabilities put in school and community. The Kamunge report emphasized the need for integrations of learners with special needs in regular school. It also investigated specific categories of learners with special needs and recommended on how to meet their needs accordingly KISE (2002). According to the GoK (2005) the gender policy in education singles out education for learners with special needs and disabilities as an area of specific focus. The policy states that to increase participation retention and completion for learners with special needs and disabilities the government should provide an enabling environment. This should be done through flexing curriculum, providing trained personnel, equipment and facilities and ensuring accommodative physical infrastructure for learners with special needs and disabilities especially in rural areas; co-ordinates of early intervention and assessment of children with special needs and disabilities should be reinforced. To a larger extent, attaining EFA goals by 2015 has remained theoretical because the right mechanisms have seen limited implementation. It is not enough to say that everyone has a right to education without putting in place mechanism to ensure and facilitate access.

The mission of FPE according to the Kenya vision 2030 aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality of life to all its citizens by 2030 in a clean

and secure environment. However, children with special needs have not been fully catered for in education set-ups in especially in mainstream schools. The children with mental challenges successfully pass-through screening and assessment procedures in EARC centers according to the EARC report as from 2018 to 2021. However, from my observation across Gucha South sub county in combination with their glaring reports, I realize a number of discrepancies. Learners who are mentally challenged are many but their enrolment, participation, retention and completion is not adequate and because of that, mentally challenged learners might not access quality education which will help them to meet the emerging challenges in life. In the next section, I discuss how the four factors affect each other in the journey to realizing FPE and EFA by 2030 in Kenya.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The discussion is based on social model of disability as adopted by Mike Oliver who adopted it from the union of physically impaired against segregation Riesor (2002). The model encourages the society to view the issue of including the CWDS from a human right and equality perspective rather than a focus on the CWDS from participating in any situation as what handicaps their learning. The disability movement comprising of the CWDS and the discrimination against them are socially created through fear, ignorance and prejudice barriers and discrimination practices develop which disable and handicap them the CWDS are after made to feel that it is their own fault that they are different and impairment does not make them less human beings. This is emphasized well by the social model. The CWDS movement believes “cure” to the problem of disability lies in the restructuring, of the society and not focusing on the individual’s impairment.

In an integrated setting, it is the school’s responsibility to re-adjust to meet the learners need but not the learners to adjust to meet the school requirements. In the social model, it is well understood that children with disability could experience difficulties in the education system. This could be due to extensive demanding rigid, inflexible curriculum, inaccessible school environment, lack of adequate resource materials, and negative attitude among others. However, the integrated education approach suggests that, those difficulties should not be explained simply in terms of children impairments. It discourages the view that the learners face such problems due to their impairment. Under those circumstances, the option is to establish a separate special school, which would further separate these children from their peers and families and neither is it cost effective. Instead, the school should not be seen as creating barriers to learning for the learners with disabilities by failing to create an enabling and supportive environment for them. A more appropriate response is to understand the barriers to learning and work out systematically to advocate for the integration of all children however “severe” the disability of handicaps one has in the integrated education system. This could be done by trying certain intervention measures which leads to removal of the barriers. When this is done, it is expected that the handicappers would be limited even though the impairment would still be there. These are discussed as follows.

### **Teacher training level**

Vaz, et al (2015) says that teacher training is viewed to be pivotal in developing the affirmative perception and skills required for successful mainstreaming. Similar findings have been found with trainee teachers where the integration of a compulsory module on diversity in post-graduate degree promoted having an integration attended. Pedagogies that combine formal training and planned hands-on experience with learners with mental challenges have been shown to improve preparedness and positive perception towards integration. Moreover, irrespective of the degree type, trained teachers had a better understanding of the potential of learners with intellectual challenge at the completing of a unit of study with a strong focus on integration education, (Hollins 2011). However, some authors disagree that improving knowledge and confidence in intellectual challenge, education alone is insufficient in improving a positive perception towards integration and reducing related anxiety. They highlight the findings that there is a gradual

declining of positive perception towards mainstreaming in trained teachers as they advance in their training years. Perhaps an increased awareness of the challenges one is likely to face by including all learners with mental challenges might dampen teacher's openness towards being integrated (Vaz et al, 2015).

In education, teachers need professional development training on mainstream education that is concrete, specific and ongoing as necessary for promoting successful school changes regarding integration educational. In a study done by Rakap & Kaczmarek (2010), regarding teachers' perception towards integration education in Turkey, it was found that teachers with in-service education and special education certificate and those who received special education course while in college had relatively more positive perception towards mainstreaming education.

Wood cocic & vialle (2015) also conducted a study with a purpose to examine the perception of pre-service teachers towards learners with intellectual challenges analyzing their attribution responses to hypothetical learners. The study reported that one of the most important sections in the successful integration of learners with intellectual challenge in integration classrooms is the teacher. Despite strong support for integration education, teachers still demonstrate mixed responses to the integration of certain learners in the classrooms. Furthermore, their perception towards integration education seems to be formed during their initial training. Perlizepents included 205 pre-service teachers and the results demonstrated that the pre-service teachers' attribution responses differed according to whether or not the hypothetical teachers had an intellectual challenge. Their attributions and responses were likely to have an unintended negative attitude, hence on teachers' attributions, self-efficiency and motivation. One implication of this findings was that pre-service teachers training needs to include a focus on teachers' perceptions and behaviors in integration classrooms.

Positive perception in integration education can be fostered both through training in special need education and constructive experiences with learners with intellectual challenges. Pre-service training period therefore is an appropriate time to address teachers concerns and possibly modify perception towards teaching learners with intellectual challenges. The results of the studies investigations, show that the influence of special education training on teachers' perception towards integration on education indicates that training is an important factor in the formation of more positive teachers' perception. Research tends to suggest that there is a positive correlation between the amount of disability education and a teacher who has received educator's positive perception towards integration education (AVVarnidixdis & (Kalyva 2007) cited in Odongo & Davidson (2016).

This implies that government needs to implement policies in teacher training colleges and universities that protect the need to train teachers on integrating MCLs to improve their perception. If the goal is to mainstream, then no one should graduate without this beat of training. All entrants will be aware and in the end we shall have a group with full training.

### **Parental roles**

Emerlahu gives three ways to show how parents are crucial in their children's development. The family has a huge and very tough responsibility as it has to take proper care of their health, their physical development, their overall education and the development of their intellectual affinities as well as creation for better moral values, convictions and attitude. The family as an institution has to create conditions for development of positive relationship towards work, which as such is predisposition towards a better establishment of a realistic approach for better development of the children's personality.

The parents take a crucial stand when it comes to their children's development and education as whole as the parents themselves are the one of the direct holders of educational work (Emerlahu Dali, 1998). The term parent is comprehended as a set of notions such as firstly their planning and decision to their children



birth and the overall nativity rate. Secondly, their care and contribution towards raising their children. Thirdly, the parents' actions and overall parental achievement of a prior set goals. They take care on the overall children's physical and intellectual development, till the point they set independent and ready to face the challenges of the society they live in. Parents are aware of the work at the same time they need pedagogical information on the right to education of their children (Mojsovsja koleva Tatjana 2006).

The parents play general children's development. Focusing the development of their personality is seen from the perspective of three interacting factors or pleasure to their children's achievement, needs and the stress that imposes the parental role in the process and the feeling regarding the parental competency towards their children's overall development. It is consisting mainly of acquiring experiences which is usually attracted by constant learning (Lakinska Divin,2006). In this regard, the parents as well as the family as a whole, play the role of the direct leaders as well as supporters of the implementation of the education of their children as this is one of the core factors of influence. It can be seen as the fundamental one which with no doubt has a greater influence on the overall development and creation of human personality. When parents involve themselves in the education process of the children, usually the outcome can be qualified as a positive and encouraging one. In this regard, they are usually connected and act under their raw-parental attitudes, which are transmitted through their demonstration of mutual confidentiality regarding the children's capabilities and their overall learning education as a complete process. Therefore, parents should get involved on supporting their children in doing their homework as in this way they offer their parental support as one of the key strategies leading towards successful education of their children at school.

Education level of children in the family depends more on the level of the parents' education. So, this factors strongly affects family relationship and the successful development of children (Matilow, Naum 2002). In order to have good results at school, the parents' control over the child, needs to be permanent. On the other hand, in order to have success within the educational activity we are performing with the child. We need to be familiar with the same rules which are connected to the children psychological development as well. Children have two main educations in their lives; their parents and their teachers. Parents are their children's strongest model and greatest influence. Children always adopt parents' values and types of behavior (Kassap Glymasere, 2013). However, if parents are positive it will influence in their children's everyday lives and most importantly in their everyday education and the future will be more beautiful and more successful (Colanoia vera1972). An estimated 80%of all individuals with disabilities reside in isolated areas in developing countries (Oviedo 2003) with 15 million of them being children (Eleweke Rodda,2002). It goes back to governmental responsibility to create more awareness of integration even among parents. Some just abandon such children especially when it comes to education because they think it will be a waste of scarce resources since mainstream schools are not always equipped for full integration. Many of the isolations centers are ran by NGOs which may not everywhere and may not provide the necessary education sometimes because of resources which leaves many excluded. In the end it rests upon the parents to do the needful.

### **Physical Infrastructure**

Teaching children with diverse disabilities is a big challenge, especially in terms of creating a friendly environment. UNESCO (2001) points out that; learners that have diverse needs in accessibility of environment helps to keep CWDs in school unlike where schools had inaccessible environment. To alleviate this problem then the environment would be adapted to suit the diverse learner's needs. This involves organizing the classroom and school compound. (UNESCO, 2004) shows that this can be possible by building names to classroom and school buildings, construction of adapted latrines, enlargement of classroom windows, painting walls to improve the lighting and leveling of the play grounds to ease mobility. The class environment should consider the learners to learn at their own pace. Conducive social environment is also encouraged. UNESCO has given the requirements of the physical infrastructures, but

due to lack of maintenance it forces the challenged learners to mix.

When regular schools' environment is conducive, it becomes ideal for integration of learners with special needs. Schools need to have an atmosphere that is friendly, caring, accommodative, supportive and with freedom and guidance (MoF & S-Uganda, 2003; Otiato 2002). This develops the child's sense of security, confidence and ability to cope with others. Although the ministry has directed all the regular schools to enroll all the learners despite their differences, it was uncertain if all the school had adapted the environment to suit all the learners throughout the world. It is her responsibility to enforce this need if integration is to be realized in light of the vision 2030.

### **Teaching and Learning Resources**

Moodley (2002), established that in order for the learners to be active participants in learning and touching process, institutions must ensure that teaching and learning materials are used as well as made available to all the learners with special needs according to their needs. UNESCO (2004) points out that the learners must be provided with learning materials in formats that individual needs. In an inclusive setting, learners would require other resources over and above what is provided by the school. These include resources to enhance communication and mobility such as wheel chairs, crutches, positioning devices, optical devices and hearing devices (Randiki, 2002). In integration it is emphasized that teachers should use locally available resources to support learning (Moodley, 2002). Randiki (2002) and Ogot (2000) advised that, the available resources should be placed on a central place, where several schools could access them. Making use of local artisans to make and repair the devices can also help in reducing the problem (Moodley, 2002). Noting that these devices are very expensive and others are not locally available, it was uncertain if regular primary schools have the appropriate resources for all the learners with disabilities. It had also not been determined if this could affect enrolment and retention of learners with intellectual challenges. I think that this can be prioritized by government as it is a teacher motivator instead of forcing school authorities and teachers to integrate without such material. It simplifies the work of the teachers in one way or another. It allows adjustment towards integration and improves teacher's behavior and perception towards MCLs and integration in general.

One way towards attaining EFA is to have specialized schools established in different regions of the country to accommodate those learners. It can be seen as less costly rather than having all schools have such resources which may not even be utilized in some areas. This would also ease the assessment work of the officers and allow proper concentration. This would also mean specialized training to teachers to teach in these schools instead of imparting unutilized training to all teachers; it would save their time as well. We would also have only those interested in serving in such schools to get the training which would improve on the quality. However, people have seen the benefits of integration as seen in or model. Both PWDs and those without are convinced that in an integration setting, the children benefit socially and academically as they grow up having a sense of belonging. Integrated education benefits everyone from children to parents and staff. (Hunter, 2004), points out that all CWDs benefits by having access to the general education curriculum. They acquire same skills acquired by the other and this gives them a good opportunity to compete with the others in the job market. (Vaughan 2002) reported that such learners are easily assimilated by their communities. Where integrated learning is practiced, all children learn and grow in the environment that they will eventually live and work in. They are prepared for the real world. They do not have to be separated from peers and relatives. This gives them a sense of belonging and they grow up as part of the community. They learn with their peers, who are positive role models. It allows them to develop to their maximum potential.

Integrated schools provide a diverse and stimulating environment and opportunity for pupils and teachers to grow and learn the various ways of being accommodating, accepting, patient, respecting, caring and co-

operation. The children learn to support one another despite their differences (UNESCO, 2004). They learn to enjoy being with others who are different from themselves, including how to be sensitive and adapt to these differences. All children learn together and value their relationships, despite their diverse backgrounds or abilities. Their self-esteem is enhanced. There is general understanding and awareness of various disabilities. They become more resourceful and creative as they discover and appreciate each person's different abilities and characteristics. This helps the community members to acknowledge and appreciate one another despite the differences.

When the PWDs are secreted in their own institutions, there is a possibility that they may be disadvantaged compared to their counterparts in regular schools. A study by Power, De Fur and Ore Love in 2003 cited by CEC, (2003) was meant to determine the long-term effects of integrated It was found out that in general CWDs, in integration settings had acquired social and communication skills previously undeveloped. The students had shown increased interaction with peers. There was also evidence that integrated settings can expand a student's personal interests and knowledge of the world, which is excellent preparation for adulthood.

When integrated education is implemented appropriately, all students benefit (CEC, 2003c). This shows that there is need for all the children to learn together. This means that polices should streamlined to ensure that such specialized schools are regulated to pave way for full integration.

To have this done, there should be an active and facilitated enforcing body. Kenya has the Education Assessment Resource Centre (EARC/CSOSNE). The officers here have their input also in making the intellectually challenged learners comfortable in any integrated school. They must have a plan for supervision of the staff that means the special units in integrated schools, supervision involves guidance and oversight of delivery of services and facilitation of the special education teachers, professional growth and competence. It's the responsibility of the supervisor to provide the appropriate quality and frequency of the supervision to provide the appropriate and ensure safe effective provision of special needs education teachers and including but not limited to the following: Supervision of staff must be provided to the extent necessary to ensure implementation of the program policies and procedures to provide periodic on-site supervision of special education teachers in schools.

The EARCS who are now called CSOSNE arranges school schedule for service delivery and consulting with special needs teachers to keep the progress of special needs education learners, they share information with related service providers for the appropriate integration of teaching and learning resources to the learners through the teachers, gathering progress reports and anecdotal information relating to the learners progress from all related service providers to ensure the coordinators have general knowledge of the child's progress, attending all the meeting of the directors of education after initial placement, including the annual review among others (Pdel Orenzio 2015). The government should ensure that the EARC is well equipped and facilitated for the job if FPE is to be achieved in light of the vision 2030.

## CONCLUSION

It may be unrealistic to assume that MCLs will have the ability to fully learn together with other children in regular primary schools. Just sections may be put in these schools to allow the maximum interaction possible with the rest of the learners. Integration remains the way if the FPE is to have it real intended effect on primary education in Kenya. It can be realized that the government almost has the biggest role to play in these efforts ranging from priority teacher training that puts emphasis on integration, improving teacher perception of MCLs, provision of necessary resources, ensuring an enabling environment in both government and private schools and creating more awareness among parents with such children, and lastly, overseeing these efforts through the EARC. Indeed, everyone deserves an opportunity to get some form of

education.

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